

THE ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF A BILL FOR THE STATE REGISTRATION OF NURSES, AND HOW TO PASS IT

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THE history of the registration movement, both in this and other countries, has been given so in detail in the pages of our JOURNAL during the past few years, that it is not necessary to spend any time in reviewing that side of the subject. Miss Riddle's paper, published in the January number, stated in unmistakably plain words the reasons, both public and personal, for our seeking to obtain such registration.

Before passing on to the subject of this paper, as to the important features of every bill, and how it shall be passed, I wish to emphasize the fact that state registration is not, in any sense, only a state measure. It has been shown clearly that it is an international movement of an educational character, and we cannot fail to learn from the efforts of nurses in other countries, from the successes and failures both at home and abroad, that what affects the standards in one state or one country will affect, sooner or later, the standards in every state or country, so that, in the drafting of a bill, in determining those things which may be omitted and those which must be insisted upon, we must never lose sight for a moment of the fact that we are not working for ourselves alone, in one particular state, but for the whole nursing body the world over. This makes the passage of a law for state registration not so vital of itself, but only so far important as it is in its broadest effect a good law. It is better far that a state should be without laws governing registration than that it should be saddled with a statute which restricts development, which belittles nursing education, which in any way delays the development of nursing along the lines which lead to a profession, or that it shall contain weak points which will permit of political interference with its administration, or the controlling power of forces outside of the nursing body.

The pioneer period in the state registration movement is past. We

are no longer groping in the dark, as were the workers who secured the passage of our first laws, but we have the experience of others which has led to success as well as failure. We know now what the political stumbling-blocks are likely to be. We know that the cause is a just one, and that when nurses themselves and the general public have become sufficiently educated to its necessity, then, and then only, with a just legislature, may we hope for success.

The education begins within our own ranks, in our local associations, leading on to county, state, and national affiliations. The women who have been active in these organizations are ready for state registration. The women who have kept outside, through indifference or other causes, are not ready; consequently, the first place for vigorous effort is within the ranks of our own body. To pass a law for state registration with the great rank and file of the nurses of the state ignorant of the need or objects of the law, is not progress. This must be borne in mind in every state, among every group of workers.

To pass on to the consideration of the vitally essential features of every bill, it seems to me that in order for this great movement to bring eventually what we hope for, the responsibility of the regulation of the standards for training in the schools, and of the individual fitness of the graduate, must be placed absolutely upon the shoulders of the great nursing body acting through the state. We have passed through a period of more than thirty years of a divided responsibility, and our conditions have grown year by year more chaotic. There has been no recognized responsibility on the part of the schools or of the medical profession, or of nurses themselves, and we believe that, like every other profession, the burden of responsibility of the training of the nurse and her *conduct after graduation* must be borne by her fellow-workers. It is because of this reason that it is absolutely essential, first and foremost, that a bill shall be so drafted that a Board of Nurse Examiners shall be composed of nurses, and that the candidates, however appointed, shall be, when possible, nominated by the State Nurses' Association; but that if such procedure is without custom in the state, and it is considered in a sense unconstitutional for that state, then the qualifications for these candidates should be so regulated in the bill that only women of the very highest type, both morally and professionally, shall be eligible, and that upon the Board of Examiners shall rest the responsibility of the inspection of training-schools. When the movement for state registration began, the importance of inspections was not appreciated,

but in the administration of these laws inspection of the nursing schools by a nurse of broad experience in training-school administration was recognized immediately as a necessity. At least one of the later bills drafted makes provision for such inspection, a very wise feature to be included in every law.

I consider that the manner of the appointment of the examiners, whether made by the Governor or by the Board of Health, or by a Board of Regents, is not of such vital importance. The custom of the state must be followed in the registration of the other professions, and the machinery of the state utilized as far as possible, but there should be demanded the same recognition for nurses in the regulation of nursing standards that is granted by the state to medicine, pharmacy, etc. In my opinion, a bill had better be withdrawn year after year than for any other conditions in this regard to be accepted.

The next most important feature of a law I believe to be the registration of the certificate with the County Clerk, with a means of supervision of this roll definitely provided for and the fee for such registration and re-registration definitely stated.

Next comes provision for the revocation of a certificate for acts derogatory to the standards of the profession of nursing, this revocation to be within the power either of the Board or of the State Association, as may be the custom prevailing in the state. I believe that through the Board more practical results may be obtained than through the larger body of the state, which is unwieldy because of its numbers. It is also to be borne in mind that while, in the drafting of a bill, the minimum qualifications and conditions which will be accepted are to be clearly defined, they should not be so fixed that development and progress can be retarded. They should show definitely that a minimum is intended, but that this minimum is not arbitrary in its progressive limitations.

In the minor details customs within the state and the strictly local conditions must carry great weight in the drafting of a bill, and no rule can be formulated that will apply universally.

In determining the conditions of the terms of the waiver under which graduates shall be registered without examination, and reputable, experienced nurses be recognized, again standards prevailing within the state must be carefully considered. In two states at least, where the law is in force, very few of the experienced women have availed themselves of the privileges for registration granted by the statute. The bill must be so drafted that great liberality is shown in the beginning, the drawing in of the lines to be done very gradually.

Hospitals must not be demoralized in the administration of their nursing departments, but ample time should be granted for readjustment to new conditions. I am fast coming to believe that hospitals for the insane should be given more liberal consideration than has been done heretofore.

It must take much time to correct defects that have been years in accumulating without controlling influences of any kind. It is because of this necessity to work slowly in the administration of a law that many nurses are impatient and feel that after all registration is not accomplishing much. I would say to such nurses, look back five years.

To sum up, in drafting a bill see to it that the standards of training for the nursing schools, and moral and professional qualifications of the graduate, and the power to revoke a certificate for cause, rest upon the shoulders of the great nursing body, acting through a Board of Nurse Examiners vested with the authority of the state.

HOW TO PASS THE BILL

The question of education is to be considered again in connection with the passage of a bill through both houses of the legislature. The men who make up the legislative body are said to represent the average intelligence of the citizens of their district. They must be instructed in regard to the necessity for the passage of such a law, and such instruction comes best and most effectively from their home districts and from their constituents whose votes have put them into offices. Their first interest in considering any measure is naturally what their home people wish to have done about it. They are influenced greatly in a matter of this kind by what the nurses in their own section desire, but perhaps more strongly by what the fathers and brothers of the nurses think advisable, so it is very plainly shown that to secure the passage of a bill the important work is not to be done entirely at the capital, where these busy men, under the pressure of legislation, are not easily approached, but at their homes before the legislature convenes or on the days that they spend in their offices, when they may be approached by their fellow-townpeople and where they are more ready to listen to the reasons, pro and con, of such measures as directly concern their constituents. *The way to reach a legislator is through his home people.* The vote of the country representative counts the same as that of his city colleague. This gives to every nurse a definite field in which to work in her own home section. She may be only a temporary sojourner in that city or town, but if she has

access to a member of the legislature she has a definite work to do for her profession, and that she can talk intelligently in regard to the whole broad subject of registration is absolutely essential. The presentation of strong arguments in support of the registration movement before the committees of the two houses is very important, and here nurses need to secure the coöperation and support of influential men and women in the state. That there should be a definite plan for the presentation of these arguments by which certain sides of the question shall be presented is imperative—for instance, the nursing side by a nurse, the medical side by a physician, the home side by a woman representing broadly club interests, and so on. It is equally important that these arguments shall be brief, that they shall be embodied in a typewritten statement to be filed with the committee in support of these arguments, and that petitions bearing the names of the influential citizens of the state shall also be secured and submitted.

In appointing a legislative committee the State Association should be careful to select women with marked leadership qualities, who, through the positions they occupy, whether social or professional, command some political influence. The chairman of this committee should be a woman who speaks readily and clearly and whose bearing is one of womanliness and dignity. To her should be intrusted the planning of the campaign, the distribution of the work either of individuals or of committees, and she must be given the unqualified support of her associates. There must be absolute harmony in the ranks, and the women who are put forward to lead the movement must possess those qualities which quickly command confidence and respect.

Conditions in some of the states are so politically corrupt that it is almost impossible to secure the passage of any law which has for its object only the moral or educational improvement of the people. For this reason, legislation has been blocked and will be blocked in some states for a good many years to come, but the wave of public condemnation of graft and political intrigue, which is sweeping over our country, is all in favor of the successful passage and administration of such laws as those for state registration for nurses. We have only to work and be patient and not lose courage under failure.

In some of the states nurses have been their own "lobbyists"; in others, professional lobbyists have been employed. A legal adviser is necessary to guard against unconstitutional methods and to put the bill into proper legal form, but few lawyers are good judges of what constitutes the wisest standards for the advancement of nursing

education, and in this the legislative committee must hold the reins in its own hands.

A business agreement should be made with such an adviser, that the cost of such legal service may be clearly understood before the campaign begins.

Provision must be made by the State Association for the necessary expenses of the legislative committee. This is best done by making the membership fees in the state society sufficient to meet all such expenses. I have never known of money being demanded to influence votes.

The coöperation of physicians carries great weight with the legislative body, because the movement for the State Registration of nurses is in direct line with the medical laws, because medical men rank with the more highly intelligent citizens in every state, and all are voters. In every state the most liberal members of the medical profession have given their support to the movement. State medical associations have endorsed it, as have women's clubs and individual men and women of the educated classes. All such influences must be obtained and the public at large enlightened through the public press and by personal work from the nurses in the homes and before clubs when the opportunity offers. Such educational work must take time.

The great upward trend in nursing affairs, that has been so marked since the registration movement began, owes its impetus to the educational value of the agitation quite as much as to the enforcement of the laws. The quality of the nursing service in every kind of institution for the sick and insane has changed for the better since the registration agitation began.

In the face of criticism, and threatened retrograde movements, may we not take courage from this fact and hold fast to our standards and our ideals for the future upbuilding of the profession of nursing?



A CORRESPONDENT sends us the following "Practical Suggestion," which she calls a preventive, copied from a tombstone in an old English churchyard:

"Here lie I and my two daughters,
Died from drinking Cheltenham waters;
If we had stuck to Epsom salts
We wouldn't be living in these here vaults."